

Wild Acres - Habichat

For stewards of Maryland's backyard wildlife

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In This Issue...

Native Plant Profile

Berries for Winter

Field Guides

Water in Winter

HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space - **IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property.

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Native Plant Profile.....

Eastern White Pine (*Pinus strobes*)

Eastern White Pine is an excellent choice for backyard habitat for both its versatility in the landscape and its value to wildlife. It is a fast growing conifer that can reach a height of 100 feet. Three to five –inch long, deep bluish-green needles in bundles of five identify this pine from others. It grows on a variety of sites from dry to wet. Under favorable conditions a tree may live for several hundred years.

Flowers/Fruits: The flowers are inconspicuous blooming from April through June. Seeds (fruits) are produced in 4 to 8 inch cones August to September.

Landscape Notes: Attractive in all stages of its growth. White Pine provides an excellent backdrop for flowering trees and shrubs. Cone production begins at about 10 years of age.

Wildlife Value: Eastern White Pine is food for Wood Duck, Turkey, Quail, Mourning Dove, Woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Nuthatches, Carolina Wren, Cedar Waxwing, Cardinal, Grosbeaks, Goldfinch, Junco, Cottontail Rabbit, Gray, Red and Fox Squirrel, Eastern Chipmunk and White-tailed deer. Unfortunately the annual crop of pine seeds varies considerably, so it is important to plant a variety of seed producing trees for wildlife to ensure a steady food source.

Eastern White Pine is cover for: Turkey, Mourning Dove, Blue Jay, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Nuthatches, Robin, Cardinal, Rufous –sided Towhee, many species of warblers and grosbeaks. When the pine tree is young with foliage spreading close to the ground, it provides year round cover for deer and furbearers such as red and gray fox. Larger pines are favorite roosting places for robins during migration.

Eastern White Pine serves as nesting cover for: Mourning Dove, Woodpeckers, Blue Jay, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Nuthatches, Brown Thrasher, Wood Thrush, Robin, Pine Warbler, Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, and Cooper's Hawk. Pine needles are used as nesting material by many species of songbirds.

Additional Notes: White Pine's rapid evergreen growth provides protection from the weather for both wildlife and humans. One concern is the White pine weevil, which affects growth and shape. Trees planted in shady spots are less attractive to weevils than those planted in full sun. Varieties that produce thicker bark and wider trunks are more resistant to attack.

Berries for Winter

Winter food is an essential component of a property planted for wildlife. If you are doing a wildlife backyard, it is important to remember that feeding commercial birdseed attracts birds into your area, but only provides 1% to 5% of their daily food requirements. You need to provide trees and shrubs that provide winter food. One of those types of foods is berries. Birds like small berries. They are easier to get into a beak.



Berries are on a plant as a means for animals such as birds to disperse the plant seeds. Some seeds even need to go through an animal's digestive system to germinate. Birds have spread some of the most highly invasive, non-native plants. Autumn olive and bush honeysuckles (*Lonicera*) are prime examples. Please use native, non-invasives when planting for wildlife.

Here are some deciduous plants that do well in Maryland and are recommended to plant for winter berry food.

***Ilex verticillata*- “Possum haw”**

Many songbirds, particularly robins, bluebirds and mockingbirds will use this plant as well as other hollies heavily. Remember, hollies are single sexed, so you need to as a rule have one male tree to four female trees in order to produce berries.

***Pyracanthas*- “Firethorns”**

This plant will hold its berries until very late. Also serves as a good source of shelter. It is a favorite of the cardinal.



***Rhus*- “Sumacs”**

The fruit will hold on until early spring, which is essential for wintering bluebirds in Maryland. Look for varieties of smooth sumac, *Rhus glabra*, for the back yard plantings.

***Viburnums* – “Arrowood”**

These plants are fairly easy to grow in moist, acid soils, and can be found growing in shade or sun. There are many species to grow. All provide berries that last from fall to winter to provide food to numerous wintering songbirds. Over 50 species of songbirds are known to use the various species of viburnum.

***Aronia* – “Chokeberries”**

Black and Red Chokeberries are both good choices for the back yard. Robins, cedar waxwings, and mockingbirds will use both of these native species throughout the fall and winter.

Field Guides

One of the most important things you can do when managing your property for wildlife is to be able to identify the plants and animals you have or could have on the site. To be able to perform this you will need some field guides to plants and animals. Choosing a field guide can be a challenge. Here are some tips to help.



Start small. If you are new to exploring nature don't get a master's guide to birding when a beginner's guide will do. Remember, you can always add to your guide collection.

When in doubt, stay with the known names in field guide publishing. Look for names such as Peterson Field Guides, Golden Nature Guides and Audubon Society Field Guides.

Look for guides specific to your interest. Do not buy a field guide to plants of the West Coast if you are working on a backyard for wildlife in Maryland.

Several field guides are better than one. One guide may have great pictures but no range maps; another may have great range maps but poor pictures.

Picture guides are good for animals whereas keyed guides are the better choice for plant id. The picture guides help you identify things by sight. In the few seconds you have to glimpse a bird or mammal they show you what essential things to look for. Keyed guides take you through a series of questions that leads to identifying a single species.

Ask your local naturalist, park ranger and local bird watcher what their favorite field guides are.

With this knowledge it will be no time at all before you too will become an expert with the field guides.

Water in Winter

Open water during winter is unusual in nature and providing it will encourage a wide variety of birds to drink and bathe from an ice-free bath. Use an immersion heater to keep water in birdbaths from freezing. Some birdbaths even have a built-in thermostat. These electrical de-icers can be added to any existing birdbath. Plug them in at the beginning of the cold season turning them on and off as needed. Some will even shut off if the bath goes dry.

What is very important to remember is **Do Not Mix Glycerin with Water** to keep bird bath water from freezing. Birds that ingest large amounts of this mixture will experience elevated blood sugar levels, causing hyperglycemia and possibly death. Birds that bathe and preen in water that contains enough glycerin to prevent water from freezing will end up with matted feathers. Matted feathers are poor insulators and which could prove fatal during extremely cold weather.

Remember the other following birdbath basics throughout the year. The most important is to provide clean water to the bath every day. Keep your birdbath shallow. Shallow means no deeper than 3" at the center. The bath should be even shallower at the edge so the birds can ease into the water. If your current birdbath seems deep, you can put rocks in it to raise the bottom.

Make sure your birdbath is rough bottomed. Birds like people don't want to lose their footing. If the bottom of your birdbath seems slick, apply the nonskid stickers that you put in bathtubs. A 12" to 20" diameter, easy to clean, lead-free basin works best.

Besides providing clean, ice-free water, make sure your birdbath is located with an escape route from predators, not in an area where cats can hide. Put the bath on a pedestal, or hang from a tree, but within reach of a hose to be able to provide a good cleaning on a regular basis. Most importantly have the bath in view of a window so you can enjoy the bird activity you will have!



Please check out our Water Drips for Wildlife information sheet at for more ideas.

www.dnr.state.md.us/wawaterdrips.html

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- Illustration of Elderberry courtesy of Edith Thompson
- Illustration of bird bath courtesy of Edith Thompson
- Photograph of Smooth Sumac courtesy of Dave Powell, USDA Forest Service, www.forestryimages.org

Additional Information

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.state.md.us.

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 301-478-2146 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

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**For additional information about the Wild Acres Program
and for back issues of HABICHAT, Visit us on the DNR Website.**

<http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/wildacres.asp>

